

STATEMENT OF REP. GOODLATTE
CHAIRMAN, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY AND THE
HOUSE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to provide testimony on the current legislative impact of Rule X. I believe Rule X appropriately delineates subject matter jurisdiction of the several standing committees. It could stand, however, some clarification specifically in the areas of homeland security, biomass energy, food and fiber biotechnology and rural broadband technology. Clarification is imperative for the efficient operation of the House of Representatives.

Homeland Security

First and foremost Mr. Chairman, I believe the House Agriculture Committee should retain its jurisdiction over animal and plant inspection as it relates to border control and homeland security. The Committee on Agriculture has the expertise essential for overseeing detection of pests or diseases that could be harmful to Americans and American agriculture.

While some may believe that the first and only responsibility of the Department of Homeland Security is protection of our nation against acts of terrorism, I would underscore the fact that in the Agriculture Committee, we are, and rightly should be, at least as concerned about the unintentional threats since they are a constant concern.

At risk is a food production system which is truly priceless. Those with experience in this field understand the old adage: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." If an accidental introduction of Foot and Mouth Disease were to occur, it would cost our economy tens of billions of dollars. In our zeal to focus attention on the intentional threat to America, we simply cannot neglect to protect ourselves from the historical threats that continue.

This is not an exercise in marking one's territory. Jurisdiction of the various Committees and Subcommittees of the House of Representatives is divided, not because of the cynic's view that Members of Congress seek to establish and hold on to bases of power. The jurisdiction of the various Congressional Committees and Subcommittees has been established over time to mirror the complexity of the various issues with which the Congress has to deal. The fundamental responsibility of the Committees and Subcommittees of the House of Representatives is to ensure that the expertise exists to properly oversee the functioning of our government.

When the Congress authorized the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, we vested in this new department numerous diverse and complex programmatic responsibilities. From the Department of Agriculture, we provided for the transfer of up to 3,200 employees whose job it is to conduct inspections of people and commercial goods coming into our country that may intentionally or unintentionally be carrying pests or diseases that could be detrimental to US agriculture. Over the years, this function has involved the investment of billions of taxpayer dollars and had countless staff hours, education, and experience devoted to it.

Let me be clear, in the Agriculture Committee we are concerned about both intentional and unintentional threats. My fear is that a standing Committee on Homeland Security, whose purpose it is to focus on the mitigation of terrorist threats, might not pay attention to or recognize the damage that is caused by unintentional introductions of plant or animal pests or disease.

With nearly 170,000 employees and countless missions and responsibilities, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security lends itself to a functionally diverse oversight mechanism. I cannot see how a single standing Committee with a nominal staff can ever amass the expertise necessary to properly oversee all the functions of this new department. The Congress has a constitutional responsibility to ensure that sufficient resources are provided to review and analyze each of our

federal programs. A single standing Committee on Homeland Security would have great difficulty in fulfilling this responsibility and as such, I would be skeptical of any effort to establish such a permanent Standing Committee. I urge this Subcommittee to be very cautious in considering changes to the underlying jurisdictional structure of the House of Representatives.

Biomass Energy

The Committee on Agriculture requests the codification in House Rule X of our jurisdiction over agriculture-derived energy sources, commonly referred to as biomass. Biomass has been statutorily defined as any organic material that is available on a renewable or recurring basis and is composed of agricultural crops, trees grown for energy production, wood waste and wood residues, plants, residues, fibers, animal wastes and other waste materials, and fats, oils, and greases.

Most recently, this new form of energy has taken center stage in two bills that my committee has exercised jurisdiction over. First, The Energy Policy Act, commonly referred to as the "Energy Bill." As a Conferee on this bill, I was able to address issues concerning grants, research and development of this agriculture derived energy source. Additionally, during the last Farm Bill, "The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002," we devoted an entire title to energy. Included in these provisions were numerous programs and grants that have increased the research and development of these renewable fuels.

Historically, my committee has always retained jurisdiction of the issues that encompass biomass, specifically, crops, forestry products, agriculture research, and animal material. In addition to our experience in this area, my committee has already begun to retain jurisdiction over several energy bills. In fact, just this session, the Parliamentarian has referred bills to my committee that address loans for biofuels production, tax incentives for using biodiesel fuel, improving the commercial value of forest biomass, and loan guarantees for renewable energy projects using biomass material.

Energy derived from agricultural sources will continue to play an increasing role in my committee and in the future of the agriculture industry. I would like this issue specifically added to the Committee on Agriculture's Rule X

jurisdiction list so that we are able to utilize the experience and knowledge that this committee has acquired in this area.

Biotech

I would also like to request that food and fiber biotechnology issues be added to the House Committee on Agriculture's jurisdiction list.

In practice Congress relies on biotechnology as subject matter jurisdiction for referrals. Therefore, the House Agriculture's Rule X jurisdiction should reflect its interest in biotech food and fiber.

The House Agriculture Committee's jurisdiction over genetically engineered food and fiber is well established. In the 107th Congress, several biotech bills were referred primarily to my Committee. For instance, a bill to support research and development programs in agriculture biotechnology to address the food needs of the developing world (H.R. 2343), and a bill to create a program to educate the public regarding the use of biotechnology in producing food for human consumption, have been referred to the Agriculture Committee.

In the 108th Congress, our jurisdiction continues to be recognized by the referral of H.R. 2447, and H.R. 3472. These bills would create an interagency task force to promote the benefits of agricultural biotechnology. Also, H.R. 2918, a bill concerning the relationship between farmers and biotech companies that sell genetically engineered seeds, plants or animals, was referred to the Committee on Agriculture.

Rural Broadband

Continuing with technology, the Committee on Agriculture's jurisdiction includes rural affairs. Listed specifically in Rule X of the Rules of the House of Representatives are rural electrification and rural development. In accordance with this jurisdiction, I am requesting that the issue of rural broadband be added to the House Committee on Agriculture's Rule X jurisdiction list.

The Agriculture Committee has experience in addressing the needs of rural America and providing essential technology needs to areas that suffer from economic barriers to development. We have previously passed legislation

that provided loans to rural communities for electricity and telephone service, and during the last Farm Bill we authorized loan programs for rural broadband. The provision of broadband access is likely to have the same kind of major impact on rural America that extended electricity and telephone service had on rural citizens three generations ago.

Broadband is a relatively new issue that has evolved along with the technological revolution of the internet. Therefore, as this technology continues to expand in rural America it is important that the House Committee on Agriculture's jurisdiction be clarified to explicitly mention rural broadband as an area of jurisdiction.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.